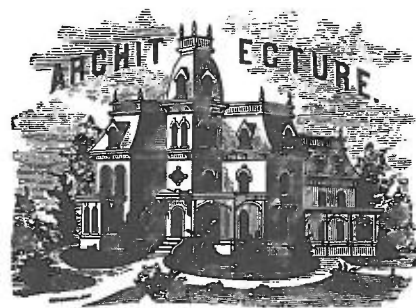


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Harry H. Cochrane
1860-1946

In his lifetime, Harry Hayman Cochrane was called "the Maine Leonardo" in recognition of the multi-faceted talents he possessed. Cochrane had so many skills that they make a seemingly endless list. He had a marvelous solo voice, composed music, made musical instruments, conducted his own orchestra, choreographed a theatrical "spectacular", composed poetry, authored a two volume town history, ran his own printing press, was an accomplished photographer, designed a coin for the U.S. Mint, wrote a novel, and was a respected portrait painter. However, this essay will deal primarily with two of his most visible talents, architecture and the decoration of public buildings, churches, and residences. It is on these talents that his reputation will be most admired in future decades.

Cochrane was born in Augusta on April 6, 1860, the son of Major James Henry and Ellen M. Berry Cochrane. His father had been a professional painter and daguerreotype photographer. During the Civil War he became Maine's Deputy Secretary of State, and in 1868 he was appointed as an assistant supervising architect in the U.S. Treasury Department.

During the four years in which he held this post, he oversaw the construction of the custom houses and post offices in Portland, Bangor, Wiscasset, and Castine. He later practiced architecture in Augusta from 1891 until his death in 1895. Because Cochrane's mother died within ten days of giving birth, the child was sent to live with his paternal grandparents in Monmouth, Dr. and Mrs. James Cochrane, Jr.

The young boy was encouraged by both his father and grandfather to pursue artistic endeavors. He graduated from Monmouth Academy and immediately found work as an apprentice in the Lewiston photographic and painting establishment of F. O. Stanley, one of the Stanley twins who would later invent the Stanley Steamer automobile. Cochrane learned photography and crayon drawing, which was the duplication of photographs into charcoal or pastel portraits. After working for Stanley, he attended the New York School of Art.

At the age of 21 in 1881, Cochrane was in Brunswick giving art lessons and doing both photography and photographic portraits in charcoal. By 1886 he was in partnership with C. G. Carleton, a Waterville photographer, and shortly thereafter he established his own photographic studio in Gardiner. During this decade Cochrane also found time to work for a portrait company in Boston, where he spent two years designing and superintending the architectural and decorative features of mechanics and food fairs. To cap this restless period, he was in New York doing decorative work for John Wanamaker's department store. From these activities, it is understandable that he was described by those who knew him as being in a constant hurry to go somewhere or to accomplish something.

In 1887 Harry Cochrane married Ida Lorena Gott of Monmouth. They began housekeeping in Monmouth, where they lived the remainder of their lives. In the same year he decorated his first church, in which he began to display his greatest talent, the interior decoration of churches, public buildings, and private residences. It was the era of grand decoration, of stencilling and free-hand ornamentation of



Figure 1. Cumston Hall, Monmouth, 1988 view by Richard W. Cheek.

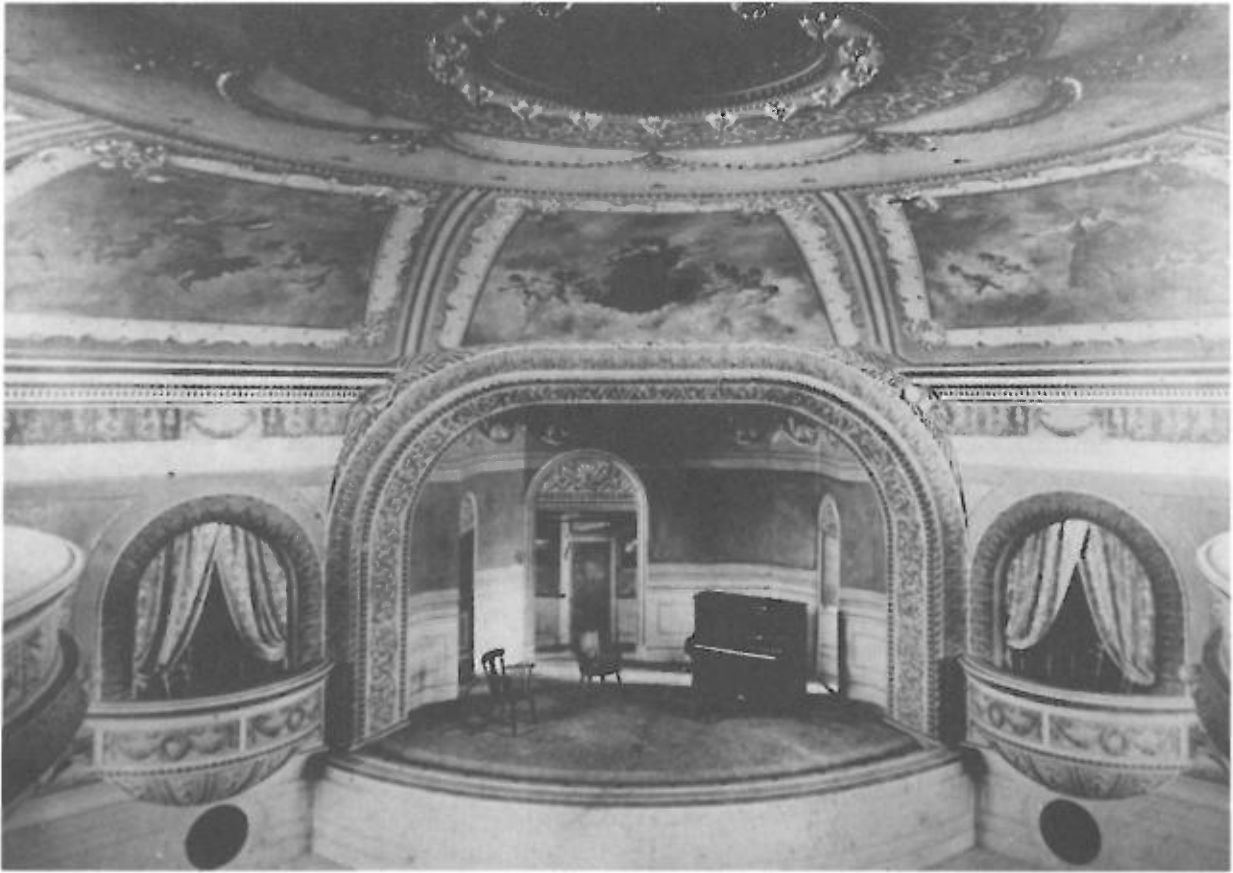


Figure 2. Interior of Cumston Hall, c. 1900 view (Courtesy of H. Earle Flanders, Monmouth).

walls and ceilings, of marblizing of plaster and wood, of artificial graining, gilding, murals, and large in situ oil paintings, of stained glass, and the highlighting of popular woods like black walnut and rosewood.

The exact number of churches, parish halls, convents, fraternal halls, banks, courthouses, and other buildings that Cochrane decorated between 1887 and his death in 1946 will never be known, since no complete record of his output survives and his geographic coverage was so broad. At one time it would probably have been easier to name towns in Maine without Cochrane commissions than to list those with his work, so widespread was his reputation. Several lists have been attempted, and one compiles 340 commissions, but it does not include much of his work outside of New England, as in Brooklyn, Rochester, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and as far away as Ohio and Tennessee. Probably between 400 and 500 projects would be a reasonable estimate.

The Boston Herald, in a special 1941 issue on culture in Maine, named four outstanding native sons in the art world: Benjamin Paul Akers and Franklin Simmons, both sculptors; Joseph C. Chase, the American Expeditionary Force painter in France, and Harry Cochrane. While today one might wonder at the omission of Marsden Hartley and others, it was indeed strong praise for Cochrane, all the more

amazing since his career was nearly over and his specialty, the art of interior decoration, was by then passe.

Cochrane's first fame outside of Maine came in 1898, the year of the huge Knights Templar triennial conclave in Pittsburgh. A competition, with a prize of \$5,000 for the best designs to decorate the convention halls and rooms, had been underway for some time. At the last minute, Cochrane was urged to enter the competition. Within one-and-a-half days he had completed his designs and a few days later was surprised to learn that he had won. The young decorator was launched on his career as a mural artist. In 1902, to expand his knowledge, he enrolled briefly at the Chicago Art Institute school.

In terms of murals alone, the Kora Temple project of 1927 in Lewiston is probably Cochrane's most spectacular work. For murals, stencils, and overall design, there would be several candidates, but the popular favorite is Cumston Hall of 1899-1900 in Monmouth (Figures 1 & 2). The Oxford County Courthouse in South Paris provides a good example of his work in public buildings. Many other interiors might be suggested, depending on the loyalty of individual historians to their communities throughout Maine.

The mention of Cumston Hall brings Cochrane's life to the turn-of-the-century and to the question of

whether he was an architect. He was not, as far as can be determined, formally trained in an architectural school, but was he more than just a Yankee jack-of-all-trades? He did study architecture on his own with the thoroughness that characterized everything he undertook. In 1916 he told an interviewer that "he studied architecture merely to familiarize himself with the mechanics involved in church and other public building decoration. It was his desire to make his decorations conform to the different styles of architecture and for this reason mastered that art."

Cochrane was so inately modest and truthful that he would never have claimed that he had "mastered the art" of architecture if he did not feel it to be true. Nor would he have spent someone else's money to erect a building if he did not feel he could give full value in return. An examination of Cumston Hall, which he totally designed and built with the aid of local workmen, shows that he had mastered the fundamentals of architecture from a structural as well as a design standpoint. Cumston Hall is a masterfully constructed edifice. Its framing is massive, its workmanship excellent; and, as proof, it has stood the passage of 88 years extremely well.

In 1899 Dr. Charles M. Cumston of Monmouth, retired headmaster of the Boston English School, proposed to his hometown the gift of \$10,000 to assist in the erection of a new town hall, if the town would pay the other half of the estimated cost. Dr. Cumston

had only one man in mind for the job, Harry Cochrane, although the 39 year old artist had never before designed a building. There were no qualms in entrusting the work to Cochrane, however, because he was already known locally as a genius.

Cochrane was given a free hand, and what had been envisioned as a new town hall became a grand Romanesque Revival structure with opera hall, library, caucus room, and town office all in one. It was entirely Cochrane's creation. He designed and executed the plaster ornamentation, the stained glass windows, the stencilling and murals, the moldings of the interior and exterior wood trim, and the color schemes. To cap his achievement, for dedication day in 1900, he composed the music and conducted the orchestra for the event. Local people were said to be as much impressed by the fact the building boasted the first electric lights in town and the first flush toilets in a public building as by the beauty of the structure.

Harry Cochrane undertook at least six other architectural commissions in Monmouth. He designed the Center School in 1897 (Figure 3) and the Exhibition Building for the Cochnewagen Agricultural Society fairgrounds in 1909. He planned his own eccentric Colonial Revival residence on Main Street in 1921 (Figure 4). It is well documented that in 1890 he re-designed an old cape, which served as the Methodist parsonage, into a mansard-roofed, turreted structure



Figure 3. Monmouth Center Elementary School, c. 1910 view (MHPC).



Figure 4. Harry H. Cochrane House, Monmouth, c. 1925 view (Courtesy of Dorothy Campbell, Monmouth).

and that he converted the vacant Congregational Church into a strikingly beautiful Masonic Hall in 1937. In 1941 he added a neo-Greek Revival facade to Monmouth Academy's 1855 main building (Figure 5), and there is an oral tradition that he worked on several other buildings in Monmouth, such as Dr. Cumston's elaborate residence.

Cochrane's architectural expertise was sought beyond Monmouth. In 1900 he submitted a design for a state pavilion to be built at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo the next year. This project failed to materialize when Maine decided to join with the other New England states in adopting a Boston architect's plans for a regional exhibition building at the fair. Seven years later Cochrane was retained to provide designs for the remodelling of a Methodist church in West Scarborough.

As pleased as he may have been with Cumston Hall and his other buildings, Cochrane considered himself primarily an artist and muralist. His career was building decoration. When he received a commission to paint a building, he was not satisfied to place stencil designs on walls and ceilings. He totally redesigned the interior. The only contract for a Cochrane commission, the Bucksport Congregational Church, shows that he was also responsible for selecting the colors for the pews to go with his new plaster decoration. Moreover, one of his former work-

men indicates that his involvement went so far as to choosing fabric for curtains, patterns for carpets, entire altar pieces, and even the cushioned kneelers. Once Cochrane left a job, his clients had a total, unified interior. His workmen recall that he was a perfectionist and that he was his own man. "No! I cannot paint by orders from committees, but must dream out my own designs", he said. He further stated, "A correct church decoration must conform strictly to the architectural construction of the building in which it is displayed... A decorator who is not familiar with, or skilled at, the principles of architecture is as handicapped as a minister without theological training."

By the 1920s Cochrane had a trusted crew to carry out his stencil decoration and color schemes. After the designs and colors were decided upon, the artist would return to his Monmouth studio to work on the murals. At the end, he would come back to the job site so that the crew could install the large canvases. The decoration of the walls and ceilings served as a "picture frame" for the murals, according to Paul Gruenwald, a former crew member. The Depression affected business, but Cochrane still made a living despite the economic doldrums and the decline in his type of painting. Gruenwald remembers that decorating a small, rural church, such as the ones in Jefferson or Vanceboro, would cost two thousand

dollars, a little more if a mural was involved. Cochrane and his crew could do three to five projects a year, with the typical large commission, such as a courthouse, taking about three months to complete. All paints were mixed from dry pigments at the site. The crew mixed either watercolor or lead-based shades as Cochrane desired. Ceilings were usually done in watercolors; so that if water from a leaking roof soaked the plaster, the drying watercolor could return to its original state. If oil-based paint had been used, it would have peeled when it became wet.

To his surviving crewmen and those remaining few who knew him, Harry Cochrane is still revered as a genius. Yet he was a totally unassuming man, proper, dignified, religious, yet friendly and easy to work for. He was always "Mr. Cochrane", not "Harry" and commanded respect immediately. Gruenwald remembers him "as a perfect Christian gentleman".

After the Depression came World War II. Increasingly, Cochrane's vocation did not fit into the new architectural styles. Yet he continued to be active and was, in fact, working on the Hammond Street Congregational Church in Bangor when he took ill and died in 1946. Time has not always treated his work kindly. For all his interiors which survive, probably more have been lost to fire, water damage, neglect, or overpainting. Yet enough of Harry Cochrane's work remains as a testimonial to Maine's most prolific interior decorator and muralist of his era. And, in the geographic center is Cumston Hall in Monmouth, his crown jewel, perfectly reflecting his desire for total unity of architecture, murals, decoration, woodwork, and stained glass as only a Yankee Leonardo could envision.

Marius B. Peladeau



Figure 5. Facade of Monmouth Academy, 1988 view (MHPC).

SOURCES

Facts and quotations for the above article come from interviews by the author with various Cochrane relatives and acquaintances, as noted below. Also helpful was the Cochrane interview by an unknown reporter published in the magazine section of the *Lewiston Journal* newspaper of October 28, 1916. The list of Cochrane's decorating commissions is contained in Arthur M. Griffith's, *A Study of the Life and Work of Harry Hayman Cochrane, the Artist* (Bates College thesis, 1950).

The following interviews are on file at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission office: Earle Flanders, Monmouth historian; Dorothy Campbell, Cochrane's niece; Paul Gruenwald, former Cochrane crew member; George Boyd, former crew member; Robert Jones, son of former Cochrane carpenter; Albert W. Kenfield, Cochrane friend.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY HARRY H. COCHRANE

Methodist Church Parsonage, Monmouth, 1890, Extant
Monmouth Center Elementary School, 1897, Altered
Cumston Hall, Monmouth, 1899-1900, Extant
Maine Building, Pan-American Exposition, 1900, Not Executed
Methodist Church, West Scarborough, 1907, Remodelling, Extant
Exhibition Building, Monmouth Fairgrounds, 1909, Extant
Cochrane House, Monmouth, 1921, Destroyed
Masonic Hall, Monmouth, 1937, Extant
Monmouth Academy Facade, 1941, Extant

Photograph of Harry H. Cochrane
Courtesy of Dorothy Campbell

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